



Uplands Permit Issued for 298 Apartments

By Meg Muckenhaupt

The e-mail that went out on Friday, March 6, was short and to the point: "Please be aware that today a building permit was issued for foundation work at the Belmont Uplands site," wrote Glenn Clancy, Belmont's Director of Community Development. "AP Cambridge

Partners has fulfilled all requirements under the Zoning Board of Appeals Comprehensive Permit and the Massachusetts State Building Code necessary to secure a building permit."

The permit ends a decade-long struggle over the fate of the Uplands, a 13-acre site that straddles Belmont and Cambridge at the edge of the Alewife reservation. Now, the way has been



Aerial view of the proposed Residences at Acorn Park, showing the proximity of Little Pond (left) and the Little River. Route 2 is shown in the upper right.

cleared for Prudential Financial to build “The Residences at Acorn Park,” a complex of 298 apartments off Acorn Park Road.

Opponents have objected to the project primarily because of its potential to increase local flooding. The project will add 300,000 square feet of impermeable surface in a locale which already suffers considerable flooding during 100-year storms, or storms which are severe enough that they have just a 1% chance of happening in a given year. Although the developer has provided flood storage for stormwater, as required by stormwater

regulations, opponents state that it won't accommodate the water from coming storms.

Storms Will Challenge Structures

At present, stormwater standards specify a 100-year storm in Belmont as a brings 6.5 inches of rain in 24 hours or 8.5 inches in 48 hours. That number derives from research published in 1961.

“...I would ask who will be responsible for damage in the future because the town let the Developer build insufficient capacity even though the town had received new information about rainfall?”

Belmont Citizens Forum

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Belmont Citizens Forum Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that strives to maintain the small-town atmosphere of Belmont, Massachusetts, by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. We do this by keeping residents informed about planning and zoning issues, by participating actively in public hearings, and by organizing forums. Our *Newsletter* is published six times a year, in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Belmont Citizens Forum.

Letters to the editor may be sent to P. O. Box 609, Belmont MA 02478 or to info@belmontcitizensforum.org.

Unfortunately, thanks to increased development in the watershed and the increasing frequency of severe storms due by climate change, Belmont has suffered several 100-year storms in the past 20 years: in October, 1996, June, 1998, and March, 2010. Updated research by a joint project of the Northeast Regional Climate Center (NRCC) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (precip.eas.cornell.edu) indicates that the rainfall estimate for 100-year storms is much too low for the Boston area, and should be 8.6 inches in 24 hours (see “Is Belmont Ignoring 50 Years of Rain Data?” Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter, May 2014).

However, it's not so easy to change regulations to reflect new data. According to Kathleen Baskin, director of water policy at Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental

Affairs, the Department of Environmental Protection is currently evaluating a new draft US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Precipitation Frequency Atlas 14, Volume 10 (New England). However, the actual Atlas 14 isn't due to be published until this fall—and even then, it would take time to change the regulations to reflect the new precipitation totals. The DEP's regulations specify NOAA Technical Paper 40 as the basis for rainfall estimates, and to change those regulations means creating new rules, giving the public time to comment, and revising the rules in light of those comments—"a 6-9 month rule-making process," Baskin wrote.

Other recent and upcoming studies also make the case that the Residences at Acorn Park are being built in the wrong place at the wrong time. On March 17, the city of Cambridge will present the interim results of Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, which will identify which areas of the city are expected to suffer increased flooding in coming years (see box.) One of those areas is likely to be the land surrounding Alewife Station and Acorn Park Drive. That area was singled out last fall in the Urban Land Institute's report *The Urban Implications of Living With Water* (see "Report Details Strategies for Alewife Floods," Belmont Citizens Forum *Newsletter*, November 2014).

The amount of stormwater entering the Little River will also increase from another development: the constructed wetlands on the Alewife reservation. Built as part of a plan to separate Cambridge's stormwater and sanitary sewers, this wetland is designed to send stormwater from nearby Cambridge neighborhoods to the Little River instead of Deer



ANDREW JOSLIN

White-tailed deer photographed at the Belmont Uplands.

Cambridge Vulnerability Meeting

Cambridge Climate Change
Vulnerability Assessment
Tuesday, March 17, 6-8PM

The interim results of the Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment will be presented and discussed at this public meeting. The meeting will focus on the physical and social vulnerabilities identified by the assessment based on scenarios for inland flooding and increasing temperatures. Preliminary coastal storm surge modeling results for 2030 will also be presented. www.cambridgema.gov. Kirsch Auditorium, Stata Center, 32 Vassar Street, MIT, Cambridge.

Island. The Environmental Protection Agency set a deadline of December 2015 for completing this project. The effects of this new stormwater plan should become visible in spring 2016.

Putting more pavement next to a vulnerable floodplain increases the risk of flooding; the billion dollar question is whether the flood storage planned at the Residences at Acorn Park will be enough. Despite years of legal challenges and activism, the Uplands stormwater system has been deemed sufficient, despite strong evidence that it will fail in a future storm. In a joint e-mail to Glenn Clancy, Anne-Marie Lambert and Fred Paulsen inquired, "...I would ask who will be responsible for damage in the future because the town let the developer build insufficient capacity even though the town had received new information about rainfall?"

The Residences at Acorn Park will feature more than 462 parking spaces, contributing traffic to the already clogged Route 2 during morning and evening rush hours.

Activists have also deplored the development's devastating effect on local wildlife. Until the Upland's owners decimated the site's trees last fall, it was one of the few sheltered areas near the Alewife Reservation that was not subject to seasonal flooding, providing breeding grounds for species ranging from white-tailed deer to ovenbirds. Time will tell how much local biodiversity will be lost due to this habitat loss.

Meg Muckenhoupt is editor of the Belmont Citizens Forum Newsletter

Save the Date

Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day Saturday, May 9, 9AM-1PM

Come work together with fellow Belmont residents for a hands-on cleanup and to perform maintenance work on upper Coal Road on Belmont's Lone Tree Hill Conservation Land.

Lone Tree Hill spans close to 100 acres. The site is shaped like a backwards C and is enclosed by Concord Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Mill Street. It was dedicated as town conservation land in October 2011. Come learn more about this valuable piece of Belmont's open space while helping maintain the area. Learn more about the trails that run through Lone Tree Hill and the meadows and open space that are home to many species of birds and mammals, and other organisms.

Meet at the Belmont Citizens Forum tent located at the Mill Street Parking Lot of the Lone Tree Hill Conservation area. For more information check the Belmont Citizens Forum web site, www.belmontcitizensforum.org, in April.



ANN COIT SIFNEOS

Selectmen Candidates Answer BCF Questions

Every year, Belmont voters elect one member of the town's three-person Board of Selectmen. This year, Andres Rojas and James Williams are running for the seat. The Belmont Citizens Forum asked the candidates to respond to the following seven questions. The candidates were limited to 1,200 words total, or an average of 170 words in response to each question.

1. How do you think Belmont Light should deal with electricity generated by residents' solar panels? What is the role of solar energy in Belmont's power grid?

Andres Rojas

The Light Board adopted a policy that provided generous continuing subsidies to those few households which purchased solar before installation costs were reduced by half. This reduction makes it unfair to impose the cost of "net metering" subsidies—which never expire—on the 10,000 households without solar in the future.

The policy is reinforced by a recent Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) study showing that installed costs of household solar panels in the US were twice those of other countries although panel costs were the same; higher "soft costs," primarily marketing, account for this.

Decreases in subsidies may lower "soft costs" by forcing installers to seek greater efficiencies and cost savings to remain competitive. A matrix is being created so Belmont Light can offer incentives for the most cost effective ways to reduce carbon including incentives for more efficient solar use. A solar farm is being considered for part of the Incinerator Site redevelopment.

Belmont Light's renewable energy purchases currently surpass Massachusetts' Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards (RPS.) This portfolio can be expected to grow.

James Williams

Belmont Light's policies should be consistent with the Town's Green Community designation and Climate Action Plan. Unfortunately, a policy

voted on in December by the Belmont Light Board including Andy Rojas clearly discourages rooftop solar. Impartial local experts have testified that this policy is not rational and ignores all state and national empirical evidence. I agree.

As a selectman, I will work to reverse this ill-conceived policy and return our town to simple retail net metering which is successfully practiced in 98% of all cities and towns in Massachusetts and in 43 other states. Rooftop solar offers many benefits to the town. Notably, load balancing and peak shaving results in lower electricity costs.

Solar is already helping the town save money. The town's existing installed 270kW solar capacity lessened the impact of the large price spike we all experienced last winter. Solar could lessen the impact of anticipated future price spikes even more if the Belmont Light had simple net metering policy.

2. Do you favor an off-road community path? What conclusions do you draw from the final Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC) report? What do you expect the new Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC) to do? How should town leaders mediate between town-wide and neighborhood preferences, which are likely to arise with any route selected?

James Williams

A community path will be revenue generating, just as the Minuteman Bikeway has proved for Arlington and Lexington. It will increase foot traffic to three business districts: Brighton Road, Belmont Center, and Waverly Square. It is expected to increase home values in Belmont.

An off-road path is what the CPAC concluded was the best option after nearly two years of study and community input. An on-road option is more costly and does not really get what the community desires in a path. The on-road options create safety issues at the endpoints and make it difficult to tie into the existing paths that people are already using. CPAC provided a number of ways to address the abutter concerns



Andres Rojas

about privacy, security, and drainage. The role of Selectman is to help show how these options can balance the needs of the larger community with those who live nearby the proposed route.

CPIC should follow the recommendations of CPAC and pursue a feasibility study of the routes they recommended. CPIC should work with our state representatives to pursue state and Federal funding.

Andres Rojas

As Board of Selectmen (BoS) Chair, I spearheaded the formation of the Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC). In fact, I am a longtime supporter of a Belmont Community Path and have worked on creating one for a number of years.

The initial Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC) mission was designed to allow the BoS to explore all options and carefully review CPAC's recommendations. CPAC has concluded that while a Community Path is possible, the project faces unique challenges requiring further thought and development.



James Williams

Accordingly, CPIAC will explore the technical feasibility of all path options. The BoS will then designate the final routes.

Meetings with abutters and neighbors of the most controversial path segments and with path advocates have given me in-depth knowledge of areas of conflict and resolution possibilities.

Ultimately, all groups will have to compromise. In particular, although off-road path segments are desirable, other designs may be needed. As we move forward to create a Community Path that meets our objectives, it is compromise that will result in what is best for Belmont.

3. Do you favor a tunnel under the railroad tracks at Alexander Avenue to help students who live north of the tracks to walk to the high school and Chenery Middle School safely? Would you work to bring this about (assuming state and federal funding covered 80% of the cost)?

Andres Rojas

The Alexander Avenue tunnel project is essential to the safety of Belmont's children; it eliminates the temptation to make a dangerous track crossing. I have put considerable effort into this project for a number of years.

MBTA staff including track and tunnel engineers have met with me to explore tunnel feasibility and costs and, to determine what can be done now. Currently, the MBTA is making some track and signaling changes to the portion of the tracks behind Channing Road.

I have provided the MBTA with numerous comments on location and project scope. These comments resulted in design modifications that do not preclude a tunnel in new MBTA work; track and tunnel engineers have given the tunnel a \$5.0 million preliminary budget guesstimate.

Ongoing work with the MBTA and Belmont's state representatives will identify ways to obtain state funding for the Alexander Avenue tunnel. The project would be eligible for additional funding as an active component of a future Community Path. Making the Alexander Avenue crossing safe will continue to be one of my priorities.

James Williams

It is estimated that there are thousands of crossings a year of the railroad tracks, mostly by high and middle school students. It makes perfect sense to provide a safe option for Winn Brook folks to walk to schools, library, and post office—especially if it can be funded primarily with state and federal funds as part of the Belmont Community Path effort or even if not.

4. In 2011 the town hired a consulting firm to study parking in Belmont Center. In 2012 Nelson-Nygaard submitted a report titled "Belmont Center Parking Plan" that recommends parking spots be priced according to their desirability (the opposite of current policy, where the most desirable spots are free). How should parking be priced in Belmont Center and in Belmont's other business districts?

James Williams

I agree with the 2012 report. Belmont should do what it can to maximize use of all available parking near its commercial centers.

One suggestion is to charge more for the more desirable spaces to incentivize longer-term parkers to park further away from the front doors of stores. This will encourage more turnover in the spaces on Leonard Street. Charging more for spaces at the back of the parking lot than is charged for Leonard Street spots seems counter to the interests of the merchants.

Another suggestion was raising the time limits for the Leonard Street spaces, while charging more, so that someone who wants to come to the center to have lunch and shop and keep an appointment could choose to do that without running into the one-hour limit. However, they would pay for the privilege of parking close to the front doors.

Andres Rojas

Within the next 18 months, Leonard Street will have metered parking based on Nelson-Nygaard recommendations. Parking on Leonard Street is expected to turn over quickly. The Clafin Street parking lot will be used for long-term parking.

Similar metering may be implemented in Cushing Square when Cushing Village and the Trapelo Road reconstruction projects have been completed. Belmont will have 50 underground, municipal parking spaces for business and retail use.

As your Selectman, I constantly seek business owner and resident input regarding ways to improve parking in Belmont's business centers. Successful parking plans are key to encouraging business and commercial development there.

5. What role, if any, does further development in Belmont's business districts play in addressing the town's long-term budget struggles?

Andres Rojas

I have worked on revitalizing Belmont's business districts for the past decade. Expanding Belmont's commercial tax base is vital to the long-term financial stability of the town, will help mitigate the impact of residential taxes that currently comprise approximately 94% of

Belmont's revenue, and will provide the vibrant shopping and dining environment residents deserve.

The town's budget struggles often end up imposing a financial burden on the primary revenue generators—residential taxpayers. Well-planned economic development in our business districts can change that; commercial taxpayers typically use fewer town services and therefore have fewer negative impacts on town expenditures.

Business district revitalization has begun with restaurants and stores such as Savinos, Il Casale, Spirited Gourmet, Vintages, Craft Beer Cellar and El Centro; they have opened because Belmont has issued more restaurant and alcohol licenses. The Belmont Center Reconstruction Project, Trapelo Road Reconstruction Project, Macy's building redevelopment, and the construction of Cushing Village will provide far greater commercial growth that will help alleviate the residential taxpayer burden.

James Williams

Development in Belmont's commercial centers is more desirable because of the quality of life in the town than because of any help it will give to the financial position of the town.

Encouraging mixed use development would make sense from the point of view of bringing customers to live where the stores and businesses are and from the point of view of smart growth since the trains and buses all serve the centers. Thriving commercial centers promote a sense of community and energy and increase the attractiveness of the town as a place to live and be engaged in.

Allowing more and potentially larger development in the centers would also mean more property tax revenue which would help the town's financial picture some, but would never be enough to solve our "structural deficit" problems. We are a geographically small, almost fully built-out town, and there is simply not enough development space to completely solve our financial problems through increasing the tax base through development. Development should be looked at carefully as part of the solution though, if we can allow some increases in areas of the town where it makes sense and

will preserve the fundamental character of the town.

6. Belmont sewage persistently seeps into the stormwater system, causing pollution of rivers and streams. During and after rains, stormwater gets into our sanitary sewers, which increases our water and sewer bills because we unnecessarily send stormwater to Deer Island for treatment. Are these problems priorities for you? How do you suggest addressing them?

James Williams

Yes, this is a priority for me. Because of climate change, flooding is expected to increase dramatically. Fixing our long-term pension obligations will free up funds to replace old sewer pipes.

If elected, I will re-institute an advisory committee on stormwater. I will actively seek federal grants to help with funding rain garden projects. High-level designs for the high school and library already exist and just need funding to implement.

Andres Rojas

Belmont's vital sewer and stormwater system is aging. Investment and technology are already addressing this and will continue to do so. Over approximately the past 10 years, Belmont has spent close to \$10 million upgrading sanitary sewer and storm drain lines. These projects are designed to decrease and prevent Deer Island charges.

I supported two Town Meeting articles authorizing borrowing for clean water issues: (1) a \$2.3 million bond issue; and (2) work ultimately valued at \$1.0 million funded through the MWRA I/I grant/loan program. Debt service for both is paid through The Sewer Enterprise Account. The Sewer Enterprise Account, a capital fund, is used to investigate issues and develop projects. Items funded by Belmont's ratepayers (items not funded by loans) have been and should continue to be funded at a level ratepayers can support — currently \$300,000/year.

Because Belmont has an aging sewer and stormwater system, borrowing should be used

when absolutely necessary. State funding can be increased through work with Senator Brownsberger and Representative Rogers.

Our 10-year investment is making a very big difference! Further investment will continue this process!

7. How should the town be addressing its underfunded pension obligation and its almost unfunded post-retirement healthcare obligation, which together amount to over \$250,000,000?

Andres Rojas

As your selectman, I recognize that 8,257 real estate taxpayers will be shouldering the enormous burden imposed by pension requirements and post-retirement (OPEB) obligations. A portion of this burden is the result of adhering to state requirements.

As required by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission (PERAC), Belmont contributes annually to its pension liability based on the actuarial approved funding schedule; the payoff date is 2027. Massachusetts law requires all municipalities to have their pension liabilities fully funded by 2040.

Belmont made 2027 the goal to fully fund its pension liability so that it could get an early start—in 2028—on significant OPEB funding. In fact, Massachusetts statutes do not require municipalities to fund OPEB liabilities but only to pay for current expense obligations.

In 2007, in response to recommendations by Belmont's financial team, Town Meeting and the Board of Selectmen approved an Irrevocable OPEB Trust, annual funding policy, and small annual contributions. This proactive approach has been received positively by Moody's, Belmont's credit rating agency.

To make sure that our taxpayers can meet pension and OPEB obligations without undue hardship, Belmont's plan spreads the expense over potentially 40-plus years, if not longer. Reforms that would help Belmont and all other municipalities must begin on Beacon Hill.

James Williams

Now that the current Board of Selectman chaired by Andy Rojas put a \$4.5 million override on the ballot, it's very important for the long-term financial stability of the town, its citizens and its creditors that this override is approved as proposed on April 7. Approval will prevent \$1.7 million of unnecessary cuts to the school budget and, equally as important \$1.1 million unnecessary cuts to other town services in fiscal 2016. However, even with approval, Belmont's financial crisis will continue for the next thirteen years and beyond unless we do something about the \$113 million pension fund amortization scheduled through 2027 and the \$200 million OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) obligation projected for 2022.

I have a clear plan for addressing both obligations. The two key drivers of the plan are 1) refinancing the pension obligation with a bond issue and 2) funding the unfunded OPEB obligation by making a \$2.5 million annual contribution to the fund. We can pay off the pension obligation by issuing a 20 year, \$60 million, <3% municipal bond in 2016. The bond would be paid off by \$4 million annual payments through 2035 which would be funded by a debt exclusion.

The OPEB fund contribution should be funded by override because the operating and capital budgets cannot accommodate such a recurring contribution and the growth of OPEB obligations were not anticipated by Proposition 2 1/2. The door-to-door cost of the pension strategy is \$80 million compared to the cost of the current strategy which is \$113 million. This approach will save us \$33 million, fix the cost of the pension funding for the next 20 years, and return the \$113 million in scheduled pension amortization payments to the operating and capital budgets through 2027.

My plan is not only the most responsible way of getting over these huge financial obstacles, but it is also essential to the future financial well being of the town. Also, moving forward from 2016, if we can control our expenses to <3% annual increase per year, the town's budget would remain in surplus through 2031 which will allow us to replenish our reserves for the inevitable unforeseen need.

Copper Beeches Grace Belmont Grounds

By Elizabeth Gourley

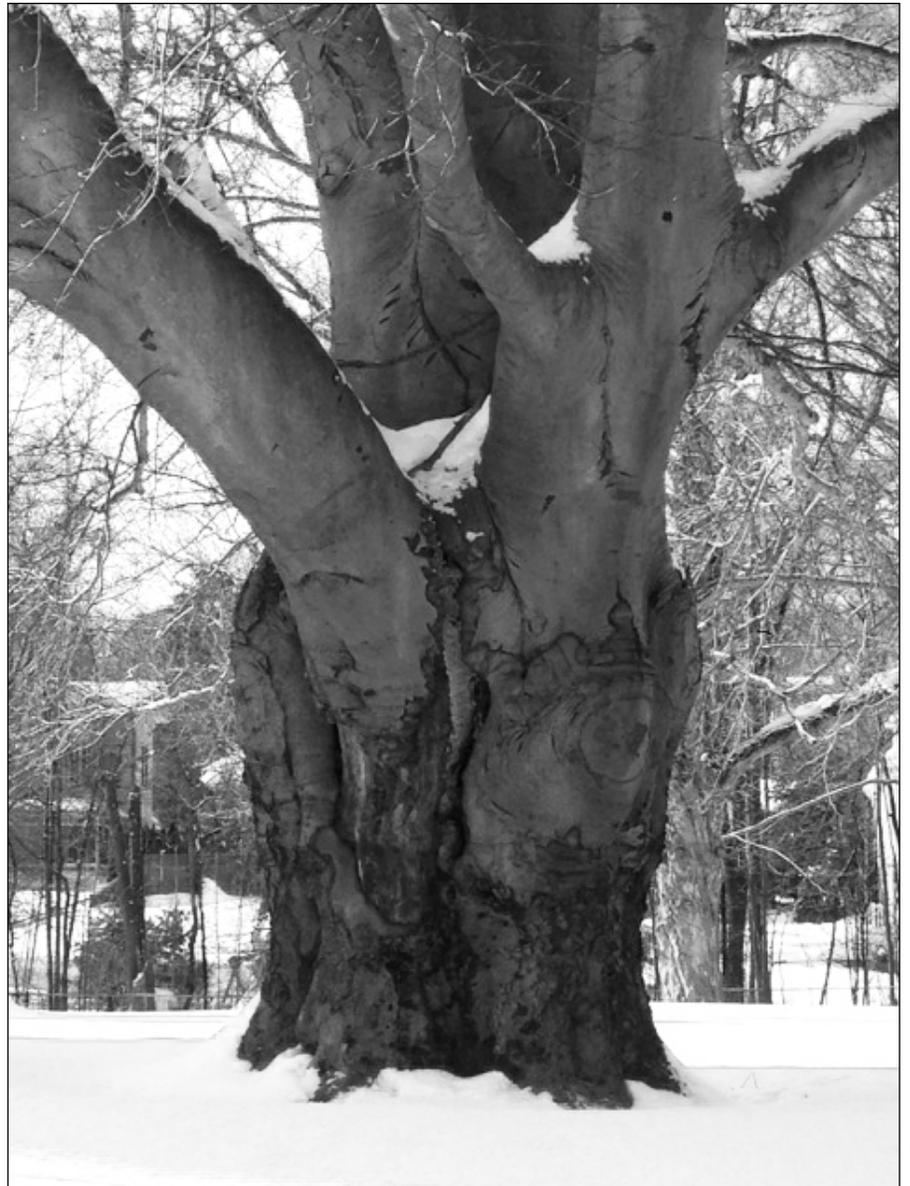
"There is no finer specimen tree; so beautiful that it overwhelms one at first glance," states Michael Dirr, University of Georgia professor and author of *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*, on the merits of the European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). One of the most striking cultivars of European beech is the copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Cuprea'). A lovely specimen can be found in the small park adjacent to The First Church in Belmont Unitarian Universalist where Concord Avenue and Common Street intersect. This majestic tree has been overseeing our comings and goings for over 150 years. Tom Walsh, Belmont's tree warden, estimates this tree has most likely been in this location since the church was built in the 1850s.

The copper beech is one of 45 cultivars that have been developed in both the wild and under cultivation from the European beech, unlike the American beech (*Fagus grandiflora*), which has no cultivars. Although they are not fast growing, these trees reach sizes of 60' high with a 45' spread, and can reach heights of 100' given the right growing conditions. Oval in character when young, these trees mature to be densely pyramidal to oval to round with branching close to the ground casting dark shade in the summer. Alternately, beech can grow close together in tight groves or be trained into a clipped hedge. Their muscular trunks have smooth light grey bark, which is famous for being carved with initials.

These long-lived trees provide beauty throughout the year. The leaves open in spring as deep black-red then gradually turn to purple-green in summer. In the fall, leaves turn russet and/or bronze and sometimes persist throughout winter. Bud break tends to be late, occurring in May. The purple

color leaf is a rare spontaneous mutation. The pigment anthocyanin is highly concentrated within the leaves giving the tree its unusual color. This pigment absorbs green wavelengths of light from chlorophyll and reflects red and blue wavelengths, making the leaves appear purple or copper colored.

The remains of the original European beech species have been found in Neolithic and pre-glacial deposits in England. The first authenticated sighting of the copper beech by horticulturalist in the wild was in the Hanleiter Forest in Germany near Thuringia before 1772.



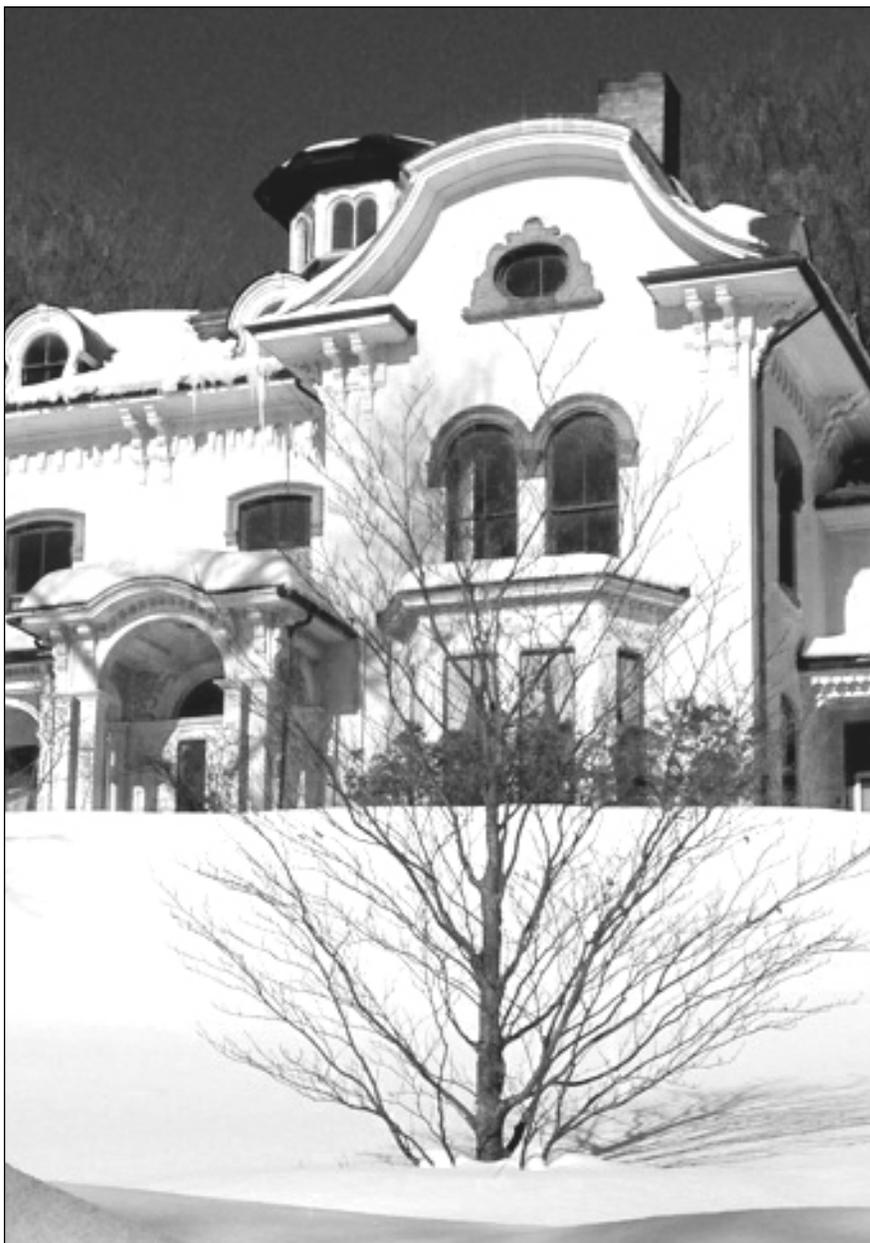
Mature copper beech outside First Church Belmont.

E GOURLEY

The copper beech was not introduced into the United States until the early 1800s. Prior to that time, American settlers focused their landscape energies on raising plants that produced food. During the 19th century, the copper beech was the most used beech in gardens, parks, and estates in the United States. In 1807, Thomas Jefferson was drawn to the tree and tried several times to grow “purple beeches” at Monticello. He finally found success after a few seasons and some of his original trees survived into the 1970s.

Belmont’s Ruth Foster wrote a column on her horticulture website, Mothersgarden.net, about two historic copper beech trees which stood in front of the Belmont Woman’s Club. These trees were pictured in Winslow Homer’s “Croquet on the Lawn” painting dating to 1866. Efforts were made in 2012 by the Belmont Woman’s Club teaming with the Belmont Land Trust to preserve these trees. The curator from Mount Auburn Cemetery’s plant collection was brought in to advise. They cautioned against growing lawn under the beech canopies. Instead, they recommended that a layer of decomposed bark mulch be placed under the tree canopies to encourage and support micro-organisms in the soil.

Mulch not only supports the health of the soil, it also helps minimize soil compaction around the base of trees by distributing weight. Beech tree feeder roots (and most all trees) are shallow growing, often located within the top 18” of soil and extending well beyond the tree’s canopy above. It is, therefore, important to avoid compacting this soil so that water, air, and nutrients can reach the roots and support the tree. Even regular foot traffic can compact some soils to such an extent that roots can no longer function properly, causing a tree’s health to slowly decline.



Copper beech sapling outside the Belmont Woman’s Club

Unfortunately, these remedial efforts did not preserve these two trees. Thankfully, the Belmont Woman’s Club has since planted two new copper beech trees on their grounds to carry on the legacy of these historic trees. Given proper and consistent maintenance and care throughout its life, the copper beech that has captivated American gardeners and artists for hundreds of years will continue to grace us with its unique beauty.

Elizabeth Gourley is a landscape architect and principal of Elizabeth Gourley Design, LLC in Belmont.

Rogers Works To Keep Rivers Flowing

By Dave Rogers

On November 4, 2014, at an event at Habitat here in Belmont, I was honored to receive a Rivers Friend Award from the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance. I received the award for my work supporting increased Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) funding and my successful efforts to protect the rollout of major changes to water supply rules in Massachusetts. Both of these issues are important for those of us concerned about careful environmental stewardship.

Between 2008 and 2012, battered by the decline in state revenue caused by the global recession, funding for DEP was cut dramatically. Although funding levels for the department have recovered somewhat in subsequent budgets, the DEP also suffered fiscal year 2015 cuts. Those cuts have set funding levels back to 20% below 2008, and that is before adjusting for inflation.

These cuts do not tell the whole tale. During the same period, DEP also lost much of its federal funding, particularly thanks to the termination of several grants caused by “sequestration” in 2013. In light of a paralyzed Congress, federal funding cannot be expected to rebound any time soon.

By 2014, DEP staffing levels had dropped from around 1,200 employees to under 800. Key programs required to meet DEP’s mandates under the federal Clean Water Act were running at just 30% of optimal staffing levels. Ever-expanding responsibilities will continue to put additional strain on the department. Cuts have already resulted in:

- Compromised water quality monitoring
- Delayed analysis of air quality, drinking, and recreational water
- Reductions in solid waste management
- Slippage in meeting EPA grant commitments, potentially interfering with DEP’s ability to secure grants in the future
- Delays in attaining federal air quality standards
- Reduced discovery and assessment of the dangers of leaking underground storage tanks

Already impoverished, DEP is also about to take on the implementation of the Sustainable Water Management Initiative (SWMI), a substantial effort that will further stretch its limited resources.

SWMI is the name for a set of recent changes to water supply permitting under Massachusetts’ Water Management Act. The new rules are intended to improve stewardship of our water resources in the Commonwealth, with an emphasis on protecting the drinking water supply and stream flow.

The SWMI process began in 2010 and brought state agencies and advocacy organizations together to craft and implement science-based policies to address immediate and long term problems. The lead environmental nongovernmental organization from this group has been the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, an umbrella organization with 57 dues-paying members and headed by Belmont’s own Julia Blatt.

One out of every five streams in Massachusetts (disproportionally in the east) already experiences unnaturally low flow each summer, with some experiencing no flow whatsoever. The consequences are both environmental and recreational. Recreation is impossible without healthy water flow, while reduced flow can lead to higher water temperatures, low oxygen levels, concentrated pollution, and algal growth. These conditions are disastrous for fish, turtles, and other aquatic wildlife. Low or absent water flow also jeopardizes local water supplies. These problems are all likely to be exacerbated by climate change.

The overarching goal of SWMI was to provide a better balance between human water use and the needs of the environment. Previous DEP regulations allocated the state’s water without considering the effect of water withdrawals on the environment.

Armed with new research from the United States Geological Survey and the MA Department of Fish and Game, DEP has categorized each of about 1,400 Massachusetts streams by degree of stream flow alteration. In light of this

information, new rules require water users in dry areas to minimize their environmental damage and require substantially more water than in the past to mitigate the new withdrawal amounts. A framework for the new rules was announced in 2012, followed by a pilot series of DEP grants to municipalities to prepare for the new permitting process, new guidance, and finally, new regulations.

Despite these good steps, there are those of us who would like to see SWMI do more. While the new rules protect healthy river basins and minimize impacts in overdrawn basins, they will not be enough to restore some of our driest streams to health.

As always, public policy is in part the art of compromise, and SWMI is both a compromise and a solid step in the right direction.

My work to protect and expand DEP administrative funding and SWMI came to a head during the fiscal year 2015 budget debate. Along with Representative Smizik of Brookline, I lobbied in the House for increased DEP funding, making it one of my key requests in meetings with the Chair of Ways and Means. DEP received \$647,398 more in the FY2015 budget than in the FY2014 budget, up to \$29,003,667 from \$28,354,269. This increase of 2.28% marked another incremental step towards restoring funding levels to where they need to be to adequately safeguard our environment.

With respect to SWMI, my advocacy came to fruition at a key moment during budget negotiations. In a meeting with the House Ways and Means Chairman, I advocated that we press forward with SWMI, ultimately prevailing to turn back an amendment offered by then State Representative and now Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Matthew Beaton. Then-Representative Beaton had sought to waylay and possibly jeopardize SWMI's rollout by requiring hearings on this highly negotiated



Dry river bed, Hopkinton, MA.

LINDA HUBLEY

compromise that, as laid out above, had been arrived at by way of an exemplary and thorough process.

As is clear, my work—our work—in this area is far from over. With adequate funding levels, the DEP and the rollout of SWMI can put us in a good position to improve our environmental practices in Massachusetts. Without adequate funding, programs like SWMI will be difficult to develop and harder still to implement.

The retroactive executive cuts to DEP's administrative budget indicate how the environment often finds itself on the chopping block. With more challenging years for our environment coming, we need to take a hard look at our funding priorities at the local, state and federal levels. Our environment bolsters our economy, keeps us safe, and makes Massachusetts a better place for all who live here. As long as I have the privilege to serve, advocating for forward-thinking environmental stewardship will always be a top priority.

Dave Rogers is the Massachusetts state representative for the 24th Middlesex District, which spans Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge.

Environmental Events

Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment

Tuesday, March 17, 6-8PM

This public meeting will present interim results of the Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment. The meeting will focus on the physical and social vulnerabilities based on inland flooding and increasing temperatures. www.cambridgema.gov. *Kirsch Auditorium, Stata Center, 32 Vassar Street, MIT, Cambridge.*

Volunteer Service Days

Saturday, March 21, 10AM-noon, and Sunday, April 5, 12:30-2:30PM

Clean up Habitat! On March 21, cut, pull and pile a variety of invasive plants from buckthorn to bittersweet. On Sunday, April 5, restore trails, prune and plant, and help set up goat areas. Children under 9th grade welcome with an adult. Free, but registration required. *Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary 10 Juniper Road, Belmont.*

How We Can Reverse Global Warming: The Good News

Monday, March 30, 7PM

Karl Thidemann, a cofounder of Biodiversity for a

Solar Update

Ashley Brown, chair of Belmont's Municipal Light advisory board, denies that he has ever said that solar power is useless to Belmont because it isn't available at Belmont's peak demand times, as was published in the January/February 2015 BCF *Newsletter*. "I never made any such statement," he said in an email to the editor of the Citizens Forum Newsletter. "I do believe solar has some value in Belmont, but not the inflated value its advocates attribute to it. Some value, however, is quite different than 'useless'." Brown declined a suggestion that he send a letter for publication in this issue.

David R. Johnson Award

Each year the Belmont Historical Society invites community members to nominate projects that have furthered preservation efforts in the town for the David R. Johnson Preservation Award. The Historical Society encourages you to look around your neighborhood and our town for projects worthy of such recognition. The call for nominations for the 2015 awards is now open. Download a nomination form at www.belmonthistoricalsociety.org or call (617) 993-2878. Nominations are due by April 15.

Livable Climate, will explain how we can take carbon out of the atmosphere and put it back into the ground. Archie McIntyre, executive director of the Wright-Locke Farm, will explain what you can do on the local level to support this growing environmental movement. Co-sponsored by Winchester Trails, Sustainable Winchester, and Winchester Farmers Market. *Winchester Public Library, 80 Washington Street, Winchester.*

No Foolin' Recycling

Wednesday, April 1, 7-9PM

Join Sustainable Belmont for a Q&A with Mary Beth Calnan, Belmont recycling coordinator, on current recycling program success and future initiatives to better overall waste disposal. Find last year's three-part Recycling Recap at sustainablebelmont.net. *Flett Room, Belmont Public Library, 336 Concord Avenue, Belmont.*

Native Meadows: Let's Get Real

Wednesday, April 1, 7-8:30PM

Larry Weaner, Principal, Larry Weaner Landscape Associates will discuss native meadows, including both multi-acre projects and small-scale residential meadows will be shown. www.grownativemass.org. *Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge.*

20th Annual Mystic River Spring Cleanup, Friends of the Mystic River

Saturday, April 25, 9:30AM-1PM

Friends of the Mystic River will host its 20th annual

Mystic River Spring Cleanup on Saturday, April 25. In the event of heavy rain, the cleanup will take place on Sunday, April 26. Cleanup supplies will be provided. The cleanup will include the Mystic Riverbend Park and MacDonald Park, but participants may travel to any other location they wish along the Mystic in Medford. Morning and lunchtime refreshments provided. www.fomr.org.
Hormel Stadium lot, 90 Locust Street, Medford.

33rd Annual Run of the Charles Canoe and Kayak Race

Sunday, April 26, 9AM-4PM

The Charles River Watershed Association's signature event, the Run of the Charles, is the largest flat-bottomed boat race in New England and a major event in Greater Boston. Registration required for racers. www.crwa.org. *Locations between Needham and Boston.*

Thank you for your continued support.

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BCF depends on volunteers.

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